

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 1184

By Tate

A RESOLUTION to honor the memory of Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks of Memphis.

WHEREAS, the members of this General Assembly were greatly saddened to learn of the passing of Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Hooks was a consummate public servant and visionary civil rights leader whose courage and wisdom served to positively shape the tenor of his times; and

WHEREAS, born in Memphis, Tennessee, on January 31, 1925, Benjamin Hooks was the fifth of seven children born to Robert and Bessie Hooks and grew up working at his father's photography store on Memphis's famed Beale Street; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Hooks received his undergraduate degree from LeMoyne College in Memphis, and, after rendering sterling service in the United States Army during World War II, he earned his J.D. degree from DePaul University Law School in 1948; and

WHEREAS, returning to Tennessee, Benjamin Hooks practiced as one of only two African American lawyers in Memphis before being ordained as a Baptist minister in 1956; during this time, he also joined Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, Southern Christian Leadership Conference and later served as Financial Secretary and board member for the organization; and

WHEREAS, after establishing his own law firm, Dr. Hooks fought to break down the inequitable barriers of segregation, and in 1965, he became the first African American criminal court judge in Tennessee since Reconstruction; and

WHEREAS, in 1972, Dr. Benjamin Hooks became the first African American member of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC); during his exemplary tenure, the FCC worked to diminish employment discrimination and to increase minority ownership of television and radio stations; and

WHEREAS, in 1977, Dr. Hooks was named Executive Director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), a post he held until 1993; he is recognized for elevating the NAACP's position on such issues as the environment, national health, and the criminal justice system; and

WHEREAS, during his illustrious tenure with the NAACP, 25 major civil rights acts were enacted by the U.S. Congress; and

WHEREAS, for his outstanding achievements, Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks was awarded the Spingarn Medal in 1986, the NAACP's highest honor; and

WHEREAS, a legendary icon of the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Hooks was the first Memphian to be honored with the prestigious Presidential Medal of Freedom by President George W. Bush as a tribute to his tireless efforts to enact social change; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Hooks also served for ten years as the Chairman of the Leadership Council on Civil Rights and was a Distinguished Professor of Political Science and History at the University of Memphis, where he provided active guidance to the Hooks Institute, a public policy research center working to advance the understanding of the legacy of the American Civil Rights Movement; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Benjamin Hooks served with acumen and alacrity as Chairman of the Tennessee Human Rights Commission, as President of the National Civil Rights Museum, and as special advisor to the NAACP on voting rights issues; and

WHEREAS, a truly spiritual man, Dr. Hooks was the longtime pastor of Greater Middle Baptist Church in Memphis, where he consistently delivered a social gospel oratory that pricked consciences and inspired sacrifice; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin Hooks was also deeply devoted to his family, and he always endeavored to remain true to family values of the highest order; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Hooks enjoyed the loving companionship of his beloved wife, Frances Dancy Hooks; their devoted daughter, Patricia; and two treasured grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, Benjamin Hooks leaves behind an indelible legacy of integrity and probity in public life, compassion and loyalty in private life, and diligence and dedication in all his chosen endeavors; and

WHEREAS, it is fitting that this General Assembly should pause to remember the bountiful life of this exceptional public servant and human being; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED SIXTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we honor the memory of Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks, reflecting fondly upon his impeccable character and his stalwart commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that we express our sympathy and offer our condolences to the family of Dr. Hooks.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.